

HORIZON NEWS #11

NEWS, THOUGHTS AND IMAGES FROM HORIZON PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

Making a portrait of someone is an honor and a privilege. It is an opportunity to look deeply into another, to see the essence of spirit as it sweeps across the surface. To do this the photographer must cross a certain threshold, enter into the presence of another being with full attention.

Jan Phillips

STUDENT PHOTOS: CLOSE-UP



Photos
(from top)
Shannon Strong
Becky Antman
Pat Cooney

Henri Cartier-Bresson, universally considered among the greatest photographers of the 20th Century, was particularly renowned for his ability to capture what came to be described as the “decisive moment.” “Decisive moment” refers to two similar, but not identical, notions in pictures of people. When a face (or faces) is the dominant subject, the term refers to the precise moment when the subject emanates what you might call “attitude,” that is, where the face reveals something interesting, expressive, meaningful. In shots that include a number of people—where faces are incidental or not even visible, the decisive moment is when there seems to be the greatest energy or significance to the human movement or gesture. That frozen moment seems exciting, alive, revelatory, unself-conscious.

To produce so many brilliant decisive moment photographs, Cartier-Bresson seemed to combine four qualities. First, anticipation; he sensed when something important was about to happen. Second, patience; he was willing to wait for that something to happen. Third, openness to the unexpected; he was clearly alert to those decisive moments that couldn't be anticipated. Fourth, timing; decisive moments happen in a split second—spontaneous expressions, movements, gestures are fleeting. The difference between a decisive moment photo and one taken just a millisecond before or after is frequently the difference between the magical and the mundane. At left we offer three shots by three students that we think have a Cartier-Bresson feel.

When your people pictures lack energy, spontaneity, interest, freshness, ask yourself: Am I anticipating? Am I patient? Am I alert and ready to shoot if and when the critical moment happens, or is my mind on how my equipment functions...or something else? If the answer is yes, then you honor Cartier-Bresson's inspiring legacy.

QUICK TIPS: TIRED OF GOING STRAIGHT?

Steve Gottlieb, Horizon's Director, returned recently from an eleven day trip to Beijing and environs. A brief report:

1. Weather in August: low 90s, high humidity, every day; one day of rain. Ugghh! The soupy weather surely contributed to...
2. Smog, haze, fog, whatever. Air so thick that when the sun was out it cast *no shadows*. City or countryside, same deal.
3. Gauzy light, a downer for most landscape and architectural photographs, is ideal for people shots. China is an amalgam of many creeds; the variety of faces is astonishing.
4. Quick tip #1: When photographing people in foreign lands, have your guide/translator engage people in conversation; while they're talking—relaxed, animated, oblivious to you—you're shooting. (Outside the big cities, the Chinese are unusually friendly.)
5. The Great Wall and the Forbidden City are surely two of the most visually astonishing places in the world...and both are highly photogenic were it not for the oppressive smog!
6. Quick tip #2: Some subjects lend themselves to an off-axis twist. For the top shot of the Great Wall, the camera was held in level position; in the second shot the camera was tilted about 30 degrees. (Be wary of shooting just *slightly* off-axis—it will usually look like you accidentally failed to hold the camera level.) We preferred the skewed version, and we added blue sky and changed the color of the shorts to enhance the image. What if there's no friend or passerby to pose in your shot? Shoot yourself, using tripod and self-timer; then review LCD for composition and proper "model" position and gesture.



ATTENTION "LOCALS"

Cecil County: A Personal Portrait, Steve Gottlieb's fifth book, is due out in October. A one-person show of prints from the book will be held at the Cecil County Arts Building in Elkton. Opening night gallery talk is Monday, November 20, 7:00 PM.

END FRAME



While we're on the subject of shooting off-axis, check out these two student photos. Carl Abrams spotted these painted lines on the street just one block from Franklin Hall, Horizon's HQ building. A great example of something everyone looks at but few really see, much less make into a great shot. On the right, Laura Brigandi placed her subject diagonally, adding energy and surprise. How do you think this shot would have looked if she had put the flower in the left corner? Not nearly as satisfying, we think. Might this have something to do with the fact that we read from left to right?

